

August 2015

Issue 7

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Magazine

PAIN AND SUFFERING

The feature that nearly broke me!

BERZERK SHOOTOUT

Which is the best arcade clone?

MAKING OF THE BOOTY REMAKE

Part two of our feature.

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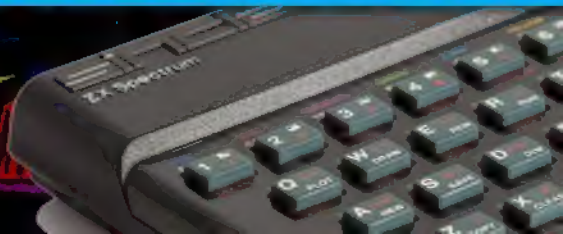
SPECIAL FEATURES



Includes material
not in the video
show!

The Hobbit 128

The classic adventure re-imagined.
Full review inside.



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EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to issue 7 of The Spectrum Show Magazine.

The main focus of this issue, for me at least, is the feature about episode 40. No one will ever know just how close I came to packing it all in and going to live in a cave somewhere. Maybe this feature will give you an idea.

Not wanting to spread misery, we conclude our making of Booty feature with a new release of the game. Yes, a few more bugs have been squashed and a new version is now available. Read the feature for more details.

As I play each game, preparing for the review, I always read the inlays to see what rubbish the publishers have crammed on. Some of the things are outrageously incorrect and really should have been pointed out at the time. The people to blame should then have been banned from advertising forever.

How can a jerky, compiled BASIC game with hardly any sound, poor graphics and terrible control be called "100% machine code program featuring 3 screens of hi-res graphics". Even the three screens claim was wrong, as anyone who has ever played C-Tech's Krazy Kong will tell you.

And how about "True Graphic Elegance" - that phrase was used to describe ETX from Abbex.

"Superb animation. High resolution graphics. Incredible explosions. Sets a new standard in Spectrum software." Well, that's The Black Hole by Quest Microsystems (below).



Like today, the marketing machine was working away to strip cash from the those that yearned to play arcade games on their television. Some things never change.

Moving on to more good news, and the release of The Hobbit 128. Some clever people from the community have got together and produced a series of images that improve on the originals.

They have also added other images from other versions of the game, crammed them into the original and released it as a 128k version.

Now some may call this sacrilege, but I must admit, it really does make the game better. And it was great to start with.

You'll find a full review on page 28.

Talking of reviews and this issue we have our very first guest review. Colony from Bulldog Software gets the once over from Dion Guy, and I must say he has done a fine job.

I have known Dion for many years, but never met him. It was he who play tested Booty when it was first released, and we had planned to do another remake between us. But life got in the way.

If anyone wants to review their favourite game, please feel free. There is always room here for your work.

More good news and I recently took delivery of a box full of Spectrum hardware, sold as "bought as seen - untested". I paid a lot for it and took a big risk, but it paid off.

Of the 8 peripherals, six are fully working and one is part working. A great result meaning I now have enough hardware for the next series and beyond.

SPECTRUM DROPPED



High street retailer Rumbelows have announced it is to drop the Sinclair Spectrum from its stores.

This is a blow to Sinclair, especially as the build up to Christmas is underway, and the Spectrum is Sinclair's top selling micro.

The decision, according to Rumbelows, was caused by the fact that competitor Dixons had pretty much tied up the market with their special Christmas bundle that included the Spectrum Plus and a few extras, all for £139.99.

Other retailers though, including Boots, WH Smith and John Menzies, are offering their own bundles for the Christmas period hoping to cash in over the next few months.

SINCLAIR DOUBLE

Sinclair are intending to launch two new micros in 1986, splitting their target audience into two distinct groups.

For gamers they will launch an improved Spectrum in the form of the 128k machine recently launched in Spain, and for serious business users, an improved QL machine.

The new Spectrum will be fully compatible with the existing 48k models, which is good news for anyone looking to upgrade.

CLIVE'S STORY

A new book covering the life of Clive Sinclair is due to be published by Duckworth.

The book will cover Clive's business endeavours, both good and bad and will be called The Sinclair Story.

THORN EMI CLOSE

Thorn EMI, the game division of the large entertainment company has decided to pull out of the market.

A management buy-out is in the pipeline, and there are high hopes that this company can continue in some form.

The company produced top selling games under its Creative Sparks label such as Macbeth and Orc Attack.

SOFT-AID ROW HOTTING UP

A row is brewing over the money earned from the Soft Aid game compilation released last year.

Around £136,000 should have been paid to the charity, but remains in the account of Microdealer UK, the distribution company for the games.

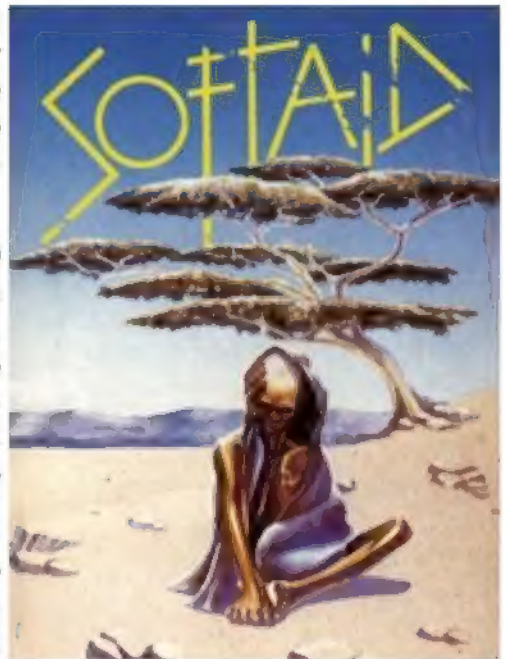
The money has also not been stored in a separate account, but that of a parent

company called Spectrum Group. This company has, in recent months, rationalised its activities which has raised concern over the cash they hold.

Microdealer claim there is no written agreement to pay the money in one lump sum and insist they will pay in instalments, although they can't say when this will begin. They have already paid the first lump sum, £150,000 previously, and the row is about the last payment.

Solicitors would soon have been involved, but Microdealer back-tracked and paid the sum in full at the end of the month.

The concerns about The Spectrum Group seemed valid as end of year figures showed them to have a pre-tax loss of around £5.1m.



BACK TO THE FUTURE

Electric Dreams have licensed the new film, Back To The Future, and is said to be developing a computer game based around the characters and plot.

The game is said to be an arcade adventure game and is expected to be launched early next year.

128K MYSTERY



The UK release of the new Sinclair machine moves a little closer as a large shipment of machines arrives on our shores.

3000 units were shipped from South Korea to Cambridge, but Sinclair refused to comment on exactly where the machines were heading.

They did confirm that the new machine, the Spectrum 128, will be launched in early 1986, so these maybe the first batch in preparation for what no doubt will be a large demand.

LORD OF THE RINGS

The eagerly awaited follow up to the Hobbit has finally been released by Melbourne House.

The Lord of The Ring part 1 is based on Tolkien's first book, and comes complete with a copy of the novel along with two cassettes.

The game is a graphic adventure allowing you to swap between characters and explore the world of middle earth.



SQUEEK SQUEEK

The first mouse for the Spectrum has been released by AMX, who already produce mice for other micros.

The AMX mouse will come as a package, and include the mouse, an interface that doubles up as a centronics connector and some software.

The software will allow for icons and drop down menus and will feature new commands for BASIC and machine code use. The complete package will cost £69.95.



BIG LOSS

Sinclair have released its financial figures for the year ending March 1985, and it's not good news.

The previous year they turned in a £14.2m profit, but this year they show a loss of £18.3m.

The figures represent the horrible year that Sir Clive's company has had, most of which you can read about in previous issues.

The company continue to increase turnover though, with exports going up, so there is still hope for the company.



SUB £100 MICRO

With the launch of the new 128k machine next year, many high street stores are beginning to reduce the price of the older Spectrum Plus, and for the first time it can be purchased for less than £100.

WH Smith are offering the machine for £99.95 on its own and still selling the joystick, interface and games bundle for £139.95.

METAL ARMY

Players: Software 1988



General Ironside and his metal army have stormed Slough power station and are threatening to blow it up. Your job is to get inside and deactivate the bomb.

Before I go into the game mechanics and tasks, I have to say this game is verging on the frustration levels I felt with *Jungle Trouble*. I spent ages trying to get somewhere just so I could do a review.

The problems start on the very first screen and here you have to get past four flame throwers, at least I think that's what they are. This involves pixel perfect movement, and so many times I never got any further than this screen.

There was no need to make this first screen so frustrating and it detracts from the game so much that I nearly didn't bother to even try to review it.

Once you get past this screen, after maybe an hour or two of trying, you get a fairly run of the mill, flip screen maze game with lifts and doors.

The screens are populated by some nicely animated enemies that can be destroyed by either shooting them, closing a door on them or lowering a lift onto them.

Your weapon, a laser thing, has limited capacity and can be re-charged at a location in the map, if you can get that far of course.

There are different coloured doors; red one's you can just get through and green ones require keys which are scattered about the game map.

Other obstacles, apart from the range of moving



droids, are floor based flame throwers and metal spikes, both of which cause un-necessary frustration, especially when they are in the same room as constantly spawning droids.

There are a few problems with the game, apart from the ones already mentioned.

The lifts work well, but it is easy to drop off them at the wrong point meaning you can't get back onto them. This means you have to find a different route, usually through a room packed full of droids and flame throwers.



The graphics are nicely drawn and move smoothly. There is some great animation too, and sound is used well. It's just the game-play that lets this thing down.

I tried, I really did try for over an hour to play the game, but it became far too annoying and I certainly won't be playing this again.

One to forget.

EL STOMPO

Stonechat Productions 2014

You play El-Stompo, a very highly skilled television repair... blob.. thing... and your task is to fix all of the televisions on each level by stomping on them. I mean, that's how you fix television isn't it?

Of course it's not as easy as that, and there are a multitude of things to get in your way. Not only that, but the ingenious level design means that this is not only a platform game, but also a strategy game.

Some platforms can be broken allowing you to drop down, some can be moved, there are trap doors, spikes, levers and a range of animals to contend with if you want to get your job down.

Special blocks open trapdoors, and other characters can trigger the levers that removes the floor, so timing is important.

Some levels require collection of items to dispose of blocking creatures, and some enemies only chase you when you are on the same level - horridly cruel.

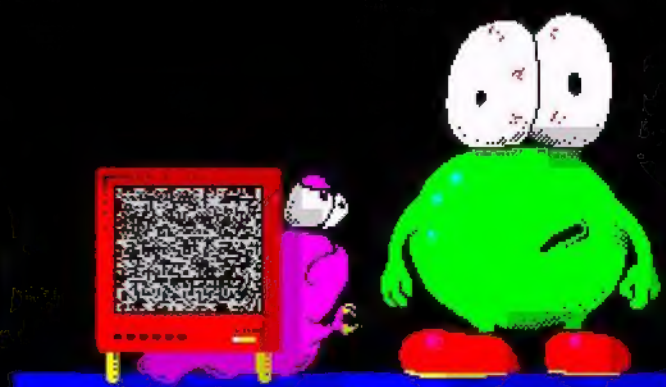
The game uses the Nirvana engine, which allows more colours to be used, quite a lot more, and this makes the game look fantastic. Normally the Spectrum can handle 1 attribute (2 colours) per 8 pixel square, the Nirvana engine, by some magic trickery, allows 4 attributes in the same space.

All 35 levels look really colourful, and not at all like the Spectrum.

Sound is limited, but suites the game, and it would have been nice to have some music playing in the background.

The animation is fun, with some great cartoon like movements, and the whole game sits together really well.

Go a grab a copy now...



THE STORY OF BOOTY - THE REMAKE

Last issue we began our story of how *Booty* the remake started. The problems encountered with Click n Create, the move to Blitz Basic and slow development of the game engine.

I had just managed to get the moving platform code into the main project and after a few tweaks everything was working great.

With that in place I quickly added the room jumping code which seemed to work first time! Why wouldn't it. The array data is just copied, the room re-build from the new array and the main loop takes over again.



Room four proved easy to add, no moving platforms. Room five and my nemesis – vertical moving platforms.

By now it was late March and there had been a nagging issue that I was deliberately trying to ignore. If Jim miss-times leaving a moving platform, he gets stuck in the middle of the floor. Again I decided to leave this until I got the vertical movers in place. Luckily (or not) this only took a few nights, so now it was time to finally fix the platform bug.

After four hours of solid coding and testing, Jim's ability to hit or miss a platform can be tweaked to make the game easier or harder. At the moment I have given him a 4 pixel zone in which to hit or miss. Four pixels above or below the platform and he will snap into place. Outside of that zone and he will plummet to his death. The four pixels can be changed to 8, 12 or anything really, so that will be down to play testing later on.

So glad that's out of the way now, although I was

beginning to think I would never solve the problem.

A few hours of play testing located two more bugs. The first caused the score to just rocket out of control for no reason and the other cause bombs to just appear for no reason. These were caused by silly typos in the code, and were fixed easily once I had located them!

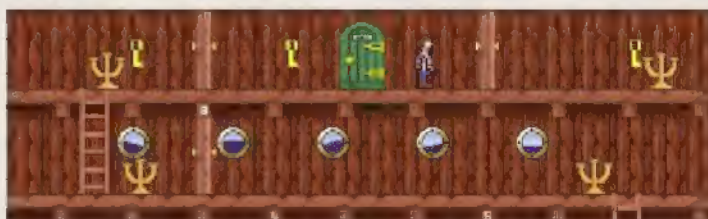
Moving forward and by April 2003 I was onto room six, the one with the nice animated portholes. Hang on, animated port holes! The game engine can't cope with animated backgrounds! Oh well, a few tweaks to the engine, importing the re-drawn graphics and a tweak to the room drawing routine gave me animated port holes.

As I moved forward adding more rooms it became apparent that my original room array idea was ideal, but did not include all of the required items. This meant I had to extend each one so that it could cope with the various moving platforms. Of course this meant changing the array copy code and screen drawing code.

Having scoured the game map whilst doing this, to make sure I hadn't missed anything, it brought to my attention that the game instructions stated that once all the treasure had been grabbed and the exit found, Jim would go onto the next 20 levels. Another 20 levels?

I played the Spectrum game all the way through just to make sure this wasn't the case, and sure enough, the game just restarts with the original rooms. Phew!

Room 7 and we have four vertical moving platforms. The game engine coped very well with these and I just had to do a small amount of tweaking to make sure Jim's transition across them worked.



Still in April and as the rooms got added, a new problem arose. Room 9 has vanishing platforms. I knew about these but didn't plan anything in code so I had to start from scratch. I tried to map the timings to the original, but I think there may be a random element in there somewhere. I added a few timers and checks to see if Jim was stood on one, and it wasn't long before I got these working.

Completing this bit of code though introduced the random bomb phenomena again! Every so often a bomb would just appear for no apparent reason, and this took a bit of tracking down. It was all linked to the room code where I had copied and pasted chunks of text for each room but forgot to change some key variables! Oh well, lesson learnt, move along.

Half way there now, room ten completed and only orphan door (doors that can't go anywhere because the rooms have not yet been created) that don't work. The rest seems to be working quite well. Room 11 and 12 quickly followed and then I hit yet another unforeseen issue, the flood.

Room 12 contains a booby trap and if you open one of the doors, the room floods. This I hadn't seen when testing, so it came as a bit of a surprise. I now had to work out how to get this into my version. A few hours later and the flood was working.

When testing this room I noticed a bug with the ladders and platforms, but only on the middle sections. Jim seems to slide down the ladders instead of staying put or climbing. I think this has to do with the bit of code I put in place to stop Jim walking through the middle of platforms when he gets off the ladders at the top. I will come back to this later.

Early May and the game is now working up to and including level 14. All the doors that can be connected are wired up and things are working well. I am very happy with the way it's going, and even added an option to switch from windowed mode to full screen mode. This did cause some flickering in the sprites, so I may have to re-visit this later on.

Because the full screen mode enlarges everything, the sprite for Jim looked really bad. I loaded up PSP and spent some time re-drawing him the best I could.

Still in May and I was working on the most complex room, room 17. Here we have 2 disappearing platforms, 3 horizontal moving platforms and one vertical moving platform. The elements all went in and the game engine coped well, but I had to do some tweaking with the timings to make the room playable.

I added an instruction screen but for some reason it crashed the game! I took it out again.

I spent some time tweaking the graphics as a result

THE FLOOD!

One room hold a nasty surprise... behind one of the doors is the ocean. Open it by mistake and its an early bath for poor old Jim.

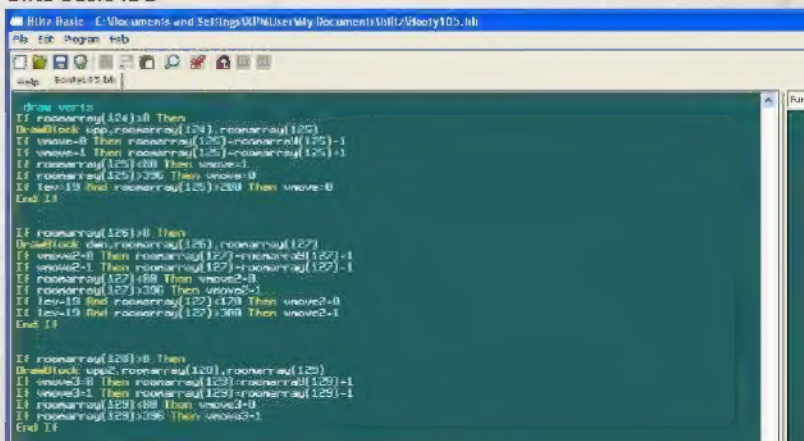
The Spectrum version used attributes to 'wash' up the screen.



I used a simple FOR-NEXT loop to draw graphic blocks up the screen. Simple but effective.



Blitz Basic IDE



FEATURE

THE STORY OF BOOTY - THE REMAKE

of full screen mode. I re-drew all the keys and doors to make them look better. There is still some flickering when using this mode, but I will fix this later.

Room 18 was completed by the middle of May leaving just two rooms left. Compared to previous rooms this was quite simple, no moving platforms, just doors and ladders.

I added a custom key routine that allows you to select your own keys, but it didn't work as well as I wanted, and looking through the code, I would have to make quite a few changes to accommodate it.

I left it out – for now.

By the end of May the last two rooms were done, and it looks like I took a short break between room 18 and the last two. These went in fairly easily meaning the game, at least content wise, was complete. I drew up a list of outstanding things which made for very depressing reading.

The list is too long to reproduce here but included checking all doors go to the correct screen, Bug fixes for score problems, ladder issues, key collection issues, object collection and pretty much every aspect of the game.

Not much then !

Just as May came to a close I had a good debugging session and cleared a lot of the issues including the ladder problem on the middle platforms, object collection and more random bombs. The problem with the score going into orbit if Jim was at the very left hand side of the screen caused a few sleepless nights!

I added a lot of debug code, printed out values to screen, tracked the code, swapped the objects, re-imported the graphics and double checked all the data blocks. At the end of my tether and just about to give up, the little blighter revealed itself. One object, when collected, was placed off-screen with just enough of its right hand edge (without any graphic

data, just the transparent background) poking into the screen. This meant that when Jim collided with it, the score was increased and the object was



placed back in the same place – repeat!

While I was tracking object collection I found that some objects in the original game could not be collected because of their position. This I replicated in my game so be warned!

One of the last things to add was the falling routine. This started off fine, but Jim only fell to the next platform where the detection code triggered and stopped him. I added a flag to identify when he was falling and not to check the collision. This introduced another problem with vertical moving platforms. Jim got his head stuck in them!

Early June and I was still tracking and fixing bugs. By this time I had given the game to a chap called Dion for play testing. He was a great help and provided invaluable reports that meant more debugging and late nights.

While the game was away with him I added the rat and parrot routines, so now they appear semi-randomly on various screens. I finally added the collision detection for Jim so he can now get killed by the pirates, rats and parrots. I added a switch that allowed Dion to switch it on or off to make things easier for him.

Back to the boring stuff and decided to take a look at the control selection options. Added my test code and things were going well, or so I thought, but this caused a few issues elsewhere in the game with keys either not working or sticking on. I removed this after a few days of pulling my hair out!

Added the "Game Over" screen and "Game Complete" screen and picked up another bug report from Dion. It



NEW BOOTY v1.05!

When trying to grab screen shots for a comparison of flood effects, I came to light that my version had several issues. Because the game uses pseudo-random events, the player can suffer from instant death syndrome when entering one of the rooms on the way to the flood room. This was caused by a parrot that randomly flew across the top of the screen and this made the game un-completable.

Somehow I found this troublesome and made the decision to fix it. The last version of the game, 1.04, was released in 2005 - ten years ago! Luckily I still have the source code and graphics, although unluckily I did not have the means to regenerate the pak file. Changing a few values in the room array removed the parrot altogether, making the game much easier and hopefully now completable.

The other issue was with the flood routine. It was written when computers were much slower and so instead of slowly filling up the screen, it just instantly appeared and threw Jim back to the first room minus a life. I added a delay into the loop and now the flood works as it should.

A quick re-compile and Booty version 1.05 is ready and available from my blog.

then came to light that full screen mode made the game run about ten times faster than normal. I had no idea why this was and in the end I opted to use scaled mode. This allows you to re-size the screen to anything you like but at the same time keeping all the game timings.

Nearly there now and by the end of June the game was almost ready. I added more sound effects, bomb collision checks and a big problem with bomb placements. Damn bombs have caused me no end of headaches. I fixed issues with platform timings in room 18, pirates not bouncing off doors and pirates walking in mid-air!

The list goes on thanks to Dion; Jim appearing in mid-air in one room, score going crazy when collecting a sword, Jim being mysteriously sent to room 1, booty resetting to 0 when collecting an item and pirates vanishing from room 9.

Finally I packed all the graphics and sound into a single file, added the code to de-compact and ran the final compile. There it was, the very first version of Booty on July 14th 2003.

That wasn't the end though, oh no. Myself and Dion continued to check the game and found several issues. Version 1.02 fixed problems with Jim falling off ladders and collecting items while falling. Then a disaster befell me and the source code was lost. Luckily I had backups, but only of version 0.9. I set about re-writing much of the code which incidentally made things much more optimised, so ver-

sion 1.03 was more or less a different game code wise.

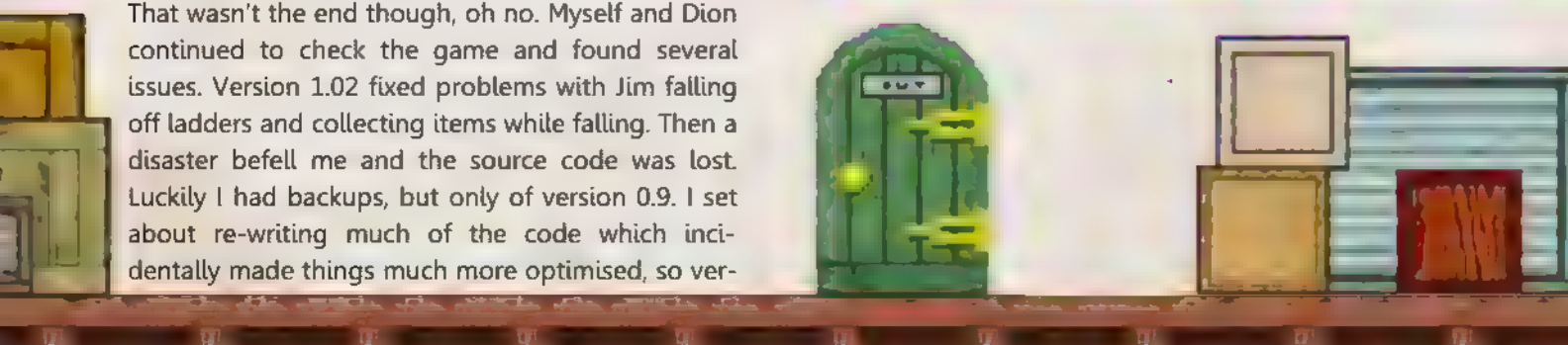
This version also had a bunch of fixes including Key collection in one room, Flickering sprites, Jim death on certain ladders, more pirates doing mid-air walks, making room 14 completable and tweaking room 17.

Shortly after this came version 1.04. A small fix to stop one pirate getting stuck in a door! That was it, the final version, or was it? Here in 2015, while testing the game for this feature I found several issues.

See the top panel for more info and a new version of the game!

Yes, after ten years a new version of the game will be available from my blog. Happy gaming.

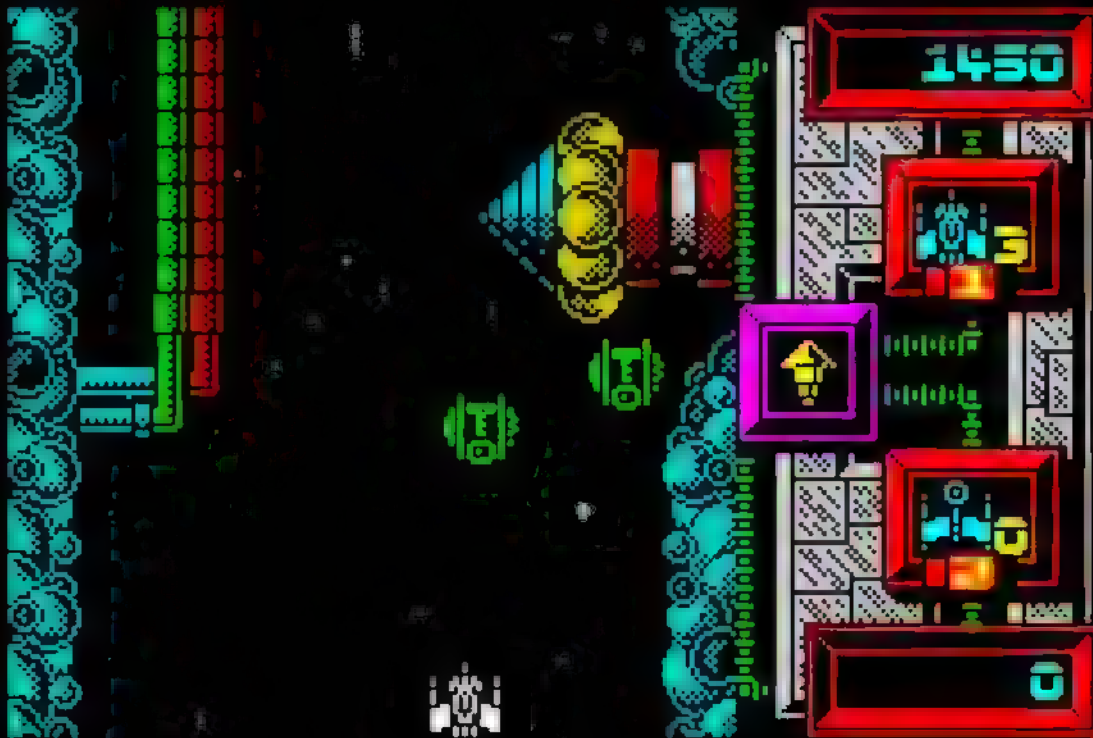
Un-used animation



GAME REVIEWS



Ace Software 1987



Seeing a zone of space labelled as "Forbidden" is an open invitation to any wannabe hero. I mean, what could possibly go wrong...

Piloting your Mk 7 Quantillion fighter into the zone, and you soon see why this area should be left well alone... but there's no turning back now... you have to fight on...

Yes, it's a shoot-em-up... and a good one too, and it follows the usual rules...

Fly through a vertically scrolling area, shoot things, collect power ups and get as far as you can.

The graphics and scrolling is really great, very smooth, colourful and full of detail. There are times when this doesn't look like a Spectrum game.

There are a multitude of aliens that swarm about, and there is not only the landscape to evade, but also alien canons.

Starting with a simple laser, the game is tricky until you

get some power ups, but it's all too easy to loose them again should you crash into anything, or get hit by the aliens.

Anyone who has watched the shows will know I love shoot-em-ups, so this for me is a great opportunity to play a game I hadn't seen before.

It took me a while to get into it, and I'm still struggling on, but loving every minute.

The initial level has very little manoeuvring space, and it's all about avoiding the enemy and trying to get power ups.

My initial attempts were poor, I was lucky if I lasted more than ten seconds, but I still wanted to keep trying.

After many plays, I can get further, but



it's still a difficult game to beat.

The graphics, as mentioned before are great and the sound works well with a variety of suitable effects.

Control is by keyboard or various joysticks and is responsive, which is very important in those tight spaces.

The power-ups range from better weapons, speed up, missiles, shields and pods... the usual stuff... the collection method takes a bit of getting used to though.

Destroying a groups of aliens will leave behind the power-up displayed on your control panel.

If you don't want it, opting to wait for a better one, you just destroy it. The icon on your panel will change to show the next power up.

Shoot a bunch of aliens and this power-up can then be collected. To collect a power up, just fly over it.

Keeping track of the power-ups can be difficult with so much going on, so my tactic is to grab everything as quickly as possible, otherwise the game won't last long.

I'm bad at these kinds of games, but still love to play them.

This is a fine example of the genre, produced late in the Spectrum's life, and showing the coding skills of that period.

The game, as it was published, contained errors that caused graphic glitches.

A fixed version is available from World Of Spectrum.

If you're a fan of this type of game, then this certainly ticks all the boxes... and is highly recommended.



GAME REVIEWS

POLE POSITION

Atarisoft 1984

Pole Position was released into the arcades in 1982 by Namco and proved an instant hit.

The built in steering wheel gave players precise control of their racing car as they tried to first qualify, and then compete.

The fast 3D graphics and memorable sound would make it challenging for home micros, not to mention how to convey that steering wheel control to keys or joysticks.

The Spectrum version is, if I'm honest, nowhere near as good as it could be.

The three main problems are...

1 - the colour of the ground. Its black... why is it black... there is no reason why it couldn't be green. This makes the game look odd. I suppose it was to get round colour clash, but.. really... I'm sure it could have been done better.

2 - the sound. The arcade had a great engine noise, and I know the Spectrum can't match it, but all we get is a continuous drone that never changes pitch. Because of this you don't get a sense of how fast you are going. There is a skidding sound, but that's just a beep.

3 - the sense of speed. There isn't any. The road side marking just flash, and don't really convey movement. The road side signs are clunky.. and sort of jump towards you in blocks.

Onto the good things then...

The scenery moves left and right as you turn corners, and control is good. Surely there must be more?

The joystick option is a bit weird, as are the other control options... the car accelerates on its own, and your only controls apart from left and right are gear change - done by up and down, and break - which is the fire button.

Once you get used to it though, it kind of makes sense.

The graphics of the car are good, looking similar to the arcade, and the crash effect is nice.

Game play wise, once you master the controls, it's not a



bad racer, and the collision is forgiving enough to allow you to overtake, even in tight situations.

It's a real pity the black colour scheme is used as at its heart, it quite a good game, but could have been so much better.

Could do better..

THE GREAT SPACE RACE

LEGEND

After Valhalla was released, gamers couldn't wait for the next game from this new company.

Valhalla broke the mould and had some wonderful scenery and animation, and a sense of humour too.

Legend began to advertise their next game furiously, touting it as something fantastic, featuring MovieSoft's system for ultra-realistic graphics. They even claimed it cost £250k to develop.

The box was massive. Inside you got a poster and booklet that outlined the game and introduced the characters using a nice comic book style.

Wow... this looks great. Let's get started...

A wondrous alcoholic drink was discovered that gets you totally plastered, never leaves you with a hangover and contains all the vitamins you need for a healthy, if somewhat inebriated life.

This drink is known as Natof (which is short for Name to follow - because no one ever got round to giving it a proper name).

So popular was this drink that the demand was huge and every wannabe businessman set out to capture the market, and so began the great space race.

With this demand of course came pirates, out to steal any cargo they happen to come across in dark distant space.

So, your job is to get a ship and join this race. To deliver this drink to the most profitable places, avoid pirates and get rich.

At the start you are introduced to the characters that are participating, and get a chance to hire them. You also get to buy upgrades like lasers and shields.

As the game begins you get some graphics that

look they came direct from the ZX81!

Your racers can be commanded to do things, but generally things will pop up on their own.

Each option has

a time limit in which to make your choice, so you have to think quick.

As the game continues you may get attacked if you fail to pay a ransom,

this takes you to a laughable space fight.

Poorly drawn ships bounce about and line drawn lasers totally miss everything. It looks awful. There is no control, you just sit back and laugh.

Finding a space wreck gives you the chance to grab some Natof free, but you have to guess the code. There is no skill, just pick a number. You either succeed or fail!

The graphics don't get any better, as you can see. The character drawings are OK, with basic animation, but nothing like the promised software movie.

On and on it goes without any chance of upgrading your ships. An endless round of - Your ship has been sighted, pay me X amounts of Natof or I attack... Attack takes place... repeat.

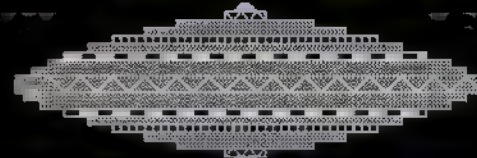
Ships can be repaired at certain destinations, but again no option to upgrade.

Sometimes your racers reach a destination only to find another racers has got their first, and sometimes they drink too much and get drunk, requiring a sobering up fee.

It's all very dull and a huge let down, and I was glad the thing ended as my last racer got blown up by a booby trap... good riddance I say...

```

WEAPONS FOR SALE
laser      400
missile    600
bomb       1300
shield     1000
hire racer
  
```



```

T-35: Shield installed on Dos's
ship.
T-9: Bomb installed on Dos's
ship.
T-4: Dos's ship cannot carry
more bombs.
  
```

```

VIEW: Meena at NATOF
1 Meena
2 Noxin
3 Gurm
4 Dos
5 SYSTEM COMMANDS
  
```



```

T+41: Meena says: Vindaloo's
ship sighted. Shall I attack?
T+49: Noxin says: Vindaloo's
ship sighted. Shall I attack?
T+55: Noxin's ship attacks
Vindaloo's ship.
  
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COLONY

Bulldog Software 1987

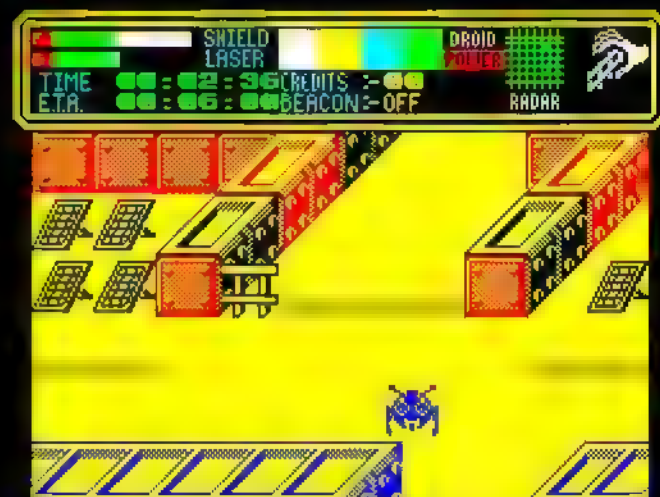
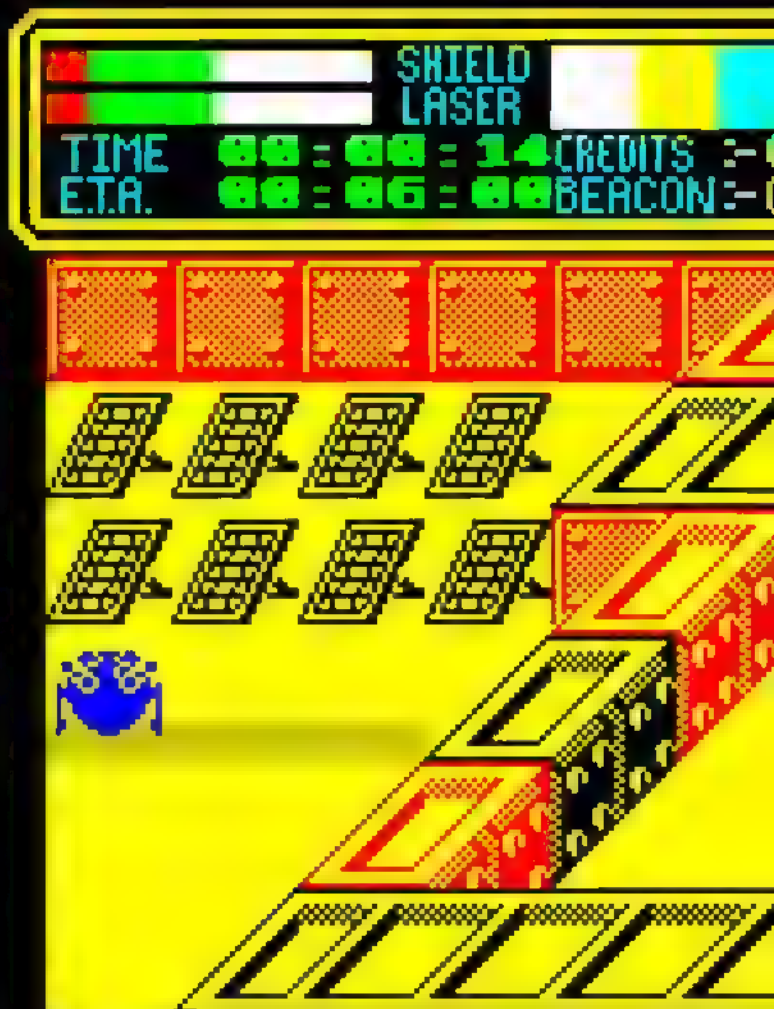
Billing itself as an "all action" strategy game, these days Colony would probably be described as an "action resource management" game, as most of the time you'll be running around frantically trying to manage your resources!

The resources in question are mushrooms. Yep, not gold or silver, but fungus. Not only that, but you get to grow them on an alien planet! No I'm not making this up. The reason for all this extra-terrestrial farming is to feed the humans who are mining iron ore on the titular colony established on this hostile world - although you never see any of this happening. Your role in all this is not as a human, but as a maintenance droid faced with a variety of tasks in order to keep the colony going.

Your main task of crop management is severely hindered by the suspiciously insect-looking aliens that are forever trying to eat... well, everything. They aren't fussy. Mushrooms, fences, solar panels - it's all the same to them. Thus begins your never ending cycle of trying to protect your crops by placing fencing around them, while also making sure enough power is available by not having half-eaten solar panels.

Fortunately you are not totally helpless, as you are armed with a laser that can make short work of the alien critters, and a shield to protect you from them. These don't last forever though, and when either charge gets low you'll need to head to the power building in order to top them back up. Let your shield run out completely and there are more serious consequences - it's game over.

The game has designated areas where you can grow your crops, and suggested places for where to put the solar panels (although these can be put almost anywhere), both of which you can attempt to shield from alien attention by using one of three fence types. In order of strength you have barbed wire, wooden and then steel mesh. Fences and solar panels that have been munched on can be taken to the appropriate place and repaired, but if your mushrooms are part-eaten then all you can do is dispose of them.



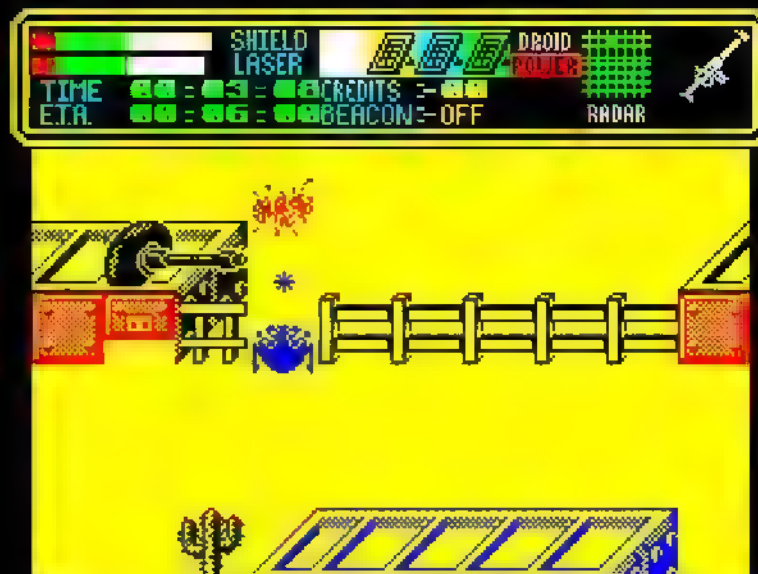
Every mushroom successfully harvested and deposited results in you receiving some credits. These can be spent on more supplies of fences, seeds and solar panels, plus some other interesting items. Need a bit of help with splatting a few aliens? Why not order a battery for use with the Remote Droid? Essentially a dumb version of yourself, this little guy runs around totally randomly and shoots the aliens. The only problem is that he will shoot at literally anything, not just the al-



aliens. Inanimate objects, thin air and even you are all legitimate targets, with you losing shield if you happen to be in his line of fire!

I won't spoil some of the other items you can get, and will just mention in passing that you and your AI-challenged pal aren't the only things that can destroy the aliens. There is also an element of basic power management in the game, which isn't too involved, but can lead to your downfall if you let it get too high (although this is easy to avoid) or low.

So this is what you have to do, but is fungi farming as exciting as it sounds? No. It's actually a lot more fun than it sounds! The best thing about this game is that there are always things to do. Always. There is never something not being gnawed on, which means that while you are waiting for your crop to grow you are constantly kept busy with running repairs and shooting bugs - sorry, aliens.



The Colony is represented by large graphics that are clear and bright, although they are more functional than attractive. To be honest you are kept too busy to really notice! The map is 64 screens in size (an 8x8 square), and is explored using flip-screen rather than scrolling. There is a radar to show where you and your robot pal are, but it serves no real purpose. The sound is sparse, but the few effects used work well, and a nice enough tune plays on the title screen.

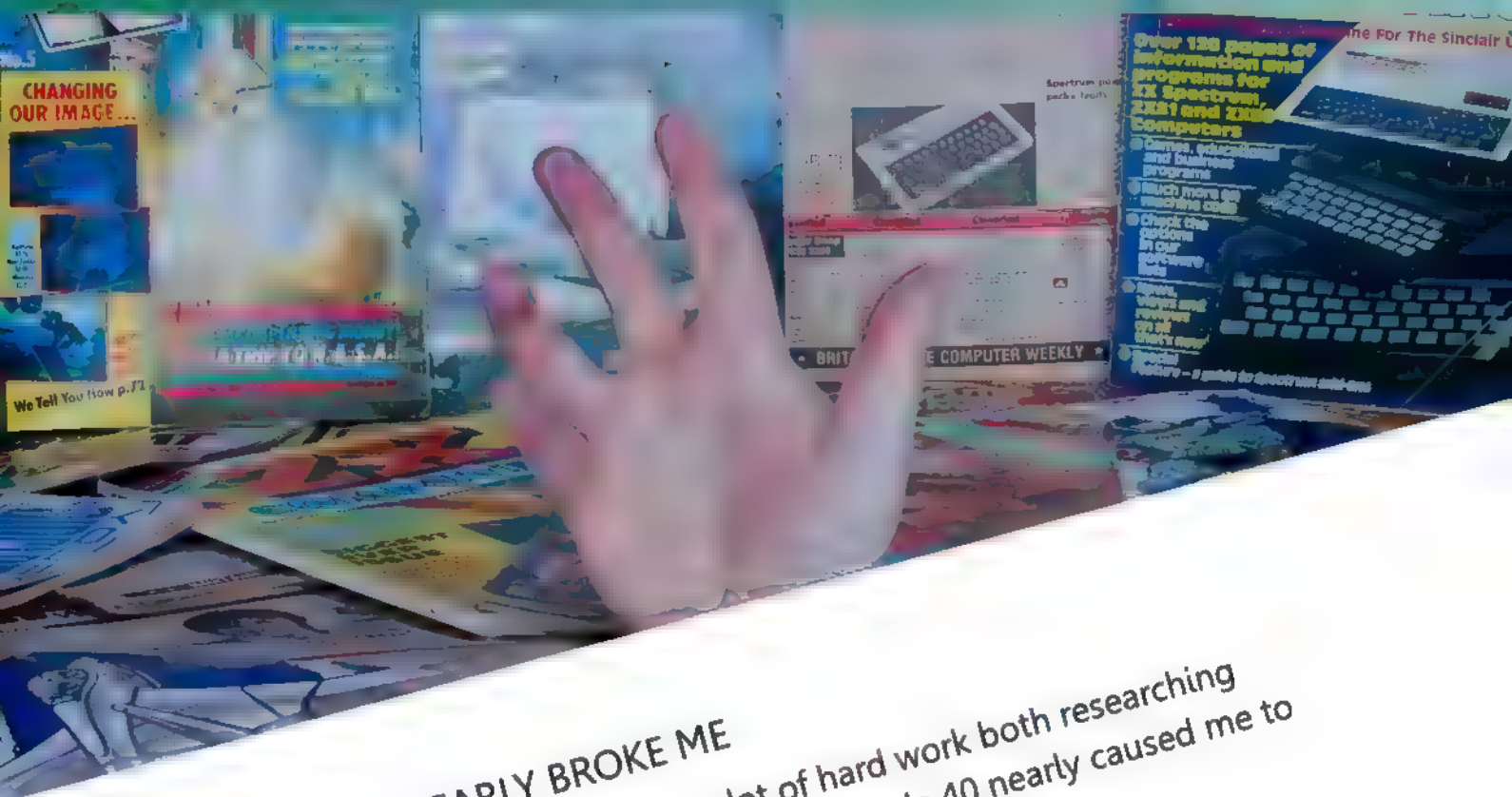
A couple of things do let the game down though. Firstly the controls can be a bit finicky. Lining yourself up to pick up and drop objects being the biggest culprit. You do get used to it, but at first it can be a source of frustration. The other problem, if you are playing with a single button joystick, is having to press a key to switch modes between firing and picking up/dropping. If you have a two (or more) button joystick, and are playing under emulation, you can set the emulator to Sinclair Interface 2 and then use redefine keys to assign each control to a different button.

The second problem depends on what type of game player you are. Colony can't be completed and will go on indefinitely until you lose, which can take hours or maybe never if you get good enough. So you have to set your own goals - how many credits you can amass in a certain time limit, for example. This won't be a problem for some people, but I know some like to play a game until completion and then move on. Something to bear in mind, at least.

Overall though, this is a highly recommended game, which has a surprising amount of depth for a budget release. It takes a little while to get into, but before long you'll be coming up with ingenious ways of dealing with the alien pests, and getting satisfaction from every successfully harvested mushroom.

Review by Dion Guy

FEATURE

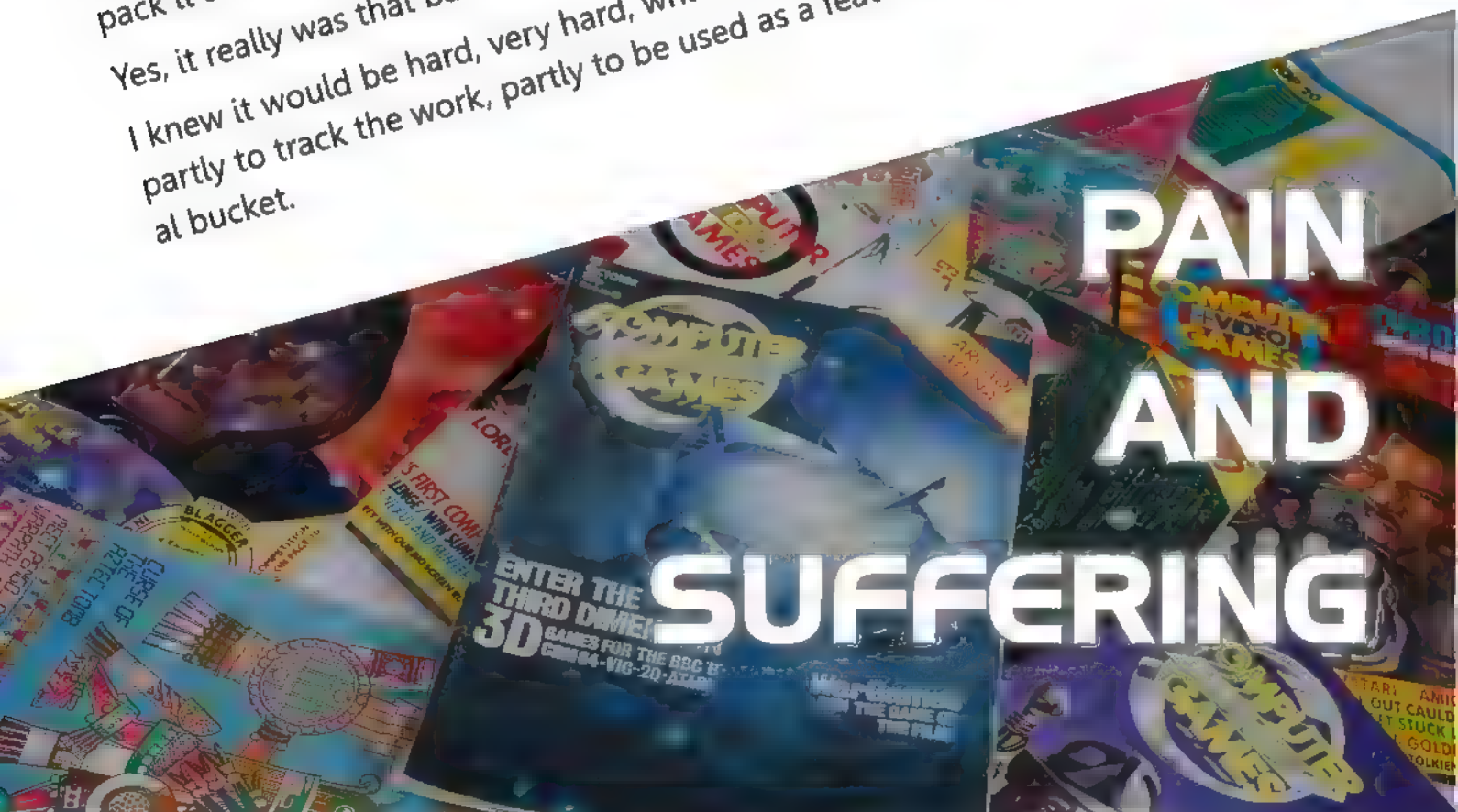


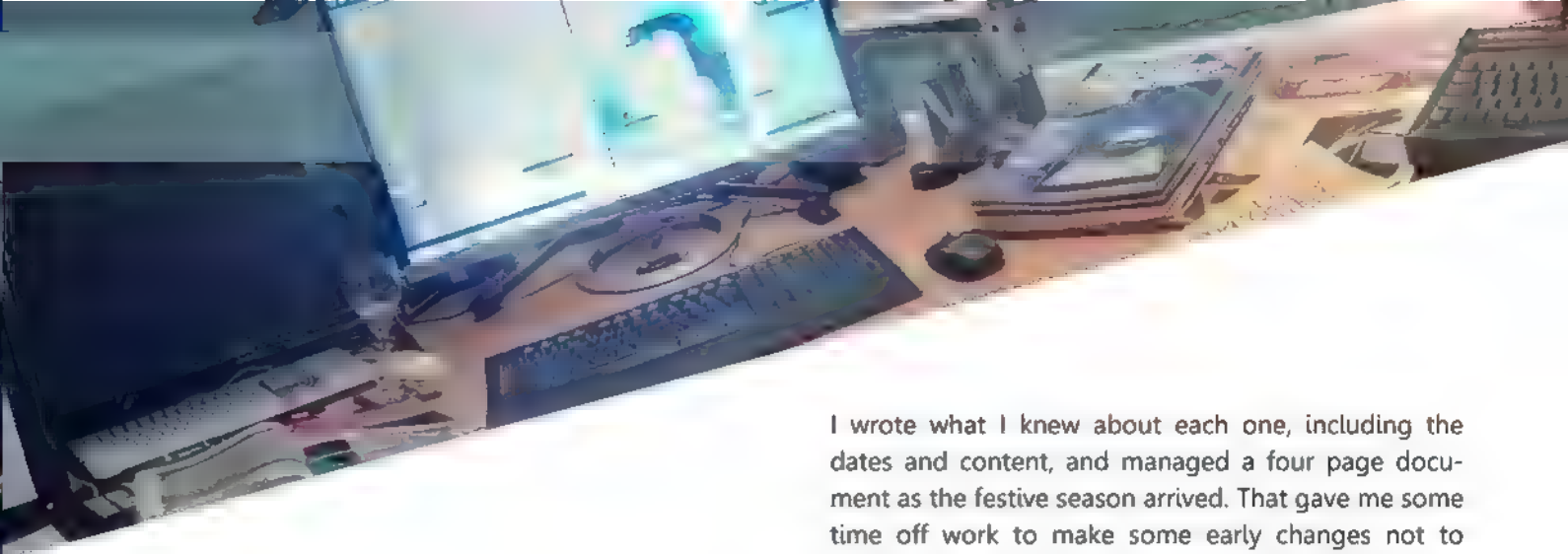
THE FEATURE THAT NEARLY BROKE ME

It was several months in the making, and a lot of hard work both researching and producing, but the end of series special for episode 40 nearly caused me to pack it all in and go live on a desert island somewhere.

Yes, it really was that bad!

I knew it would be hard, very hard, which is why I kept a kind of diary. It was partly to track the work, partly to be used as a feature and partly as an emotional bucket.





As Episode 31 arrived I was begging to get an idea for this mega feature. It was a last minute replacement for another, software related idea, that had to be dropped.

I held off making the final decision until Episode 34, when the game I needed to complete a set for the feature had still not appeared on shopping sites. That meant, with one episode per month, I had six months to come up with, research and create the end of series special. No big deal you might think, but I also had the other episode to produce as well as something called real life.

I do have a sizable collection of magazines, and had often thought about doing magazine reviews as part of the show, but why not do them all?

By mid December I began to put together a spreadsheet with all of the magazines listed including first issue date, last issue date and publisher. This took a while digging through archives, searching the internet and in some cases the information just wasn't there. Also unknown to me at the time, I had missed some off.

Next it was out with all of my old magazines. Ahh! that musty paper smell. This is where my first surprise came, I had more magazines than I had in my list. My collection is by no means all encompassing, so to find a few not on my list was a bit worrying. Computing Today, Which Micro and What Micro were duly added to my ever-growing spreadsheet.

By the back end of December I had what I thought was a complete list of magazines and a room that stank of old paper. I knew I had to photograph and scan them all, read a few issues across the magazine's life to get a flavour of each one and write a script.

December 20th and I made a start on that script. Little did I know how much it would change, how much work would be involved and how much pain it would cause me.

Onward...

I wrote what I knew about each one, including the dates and content, and managed a four page document as the festive season arrived. That gave me some time off work to make some early changes not to mention getting the December show completed and uploaded.

I knew I wanted some kind of graph or chart that display all of the magazines, when they started, when they ended and how long they were active. The first version took about a day to produce, but it did look really nice.

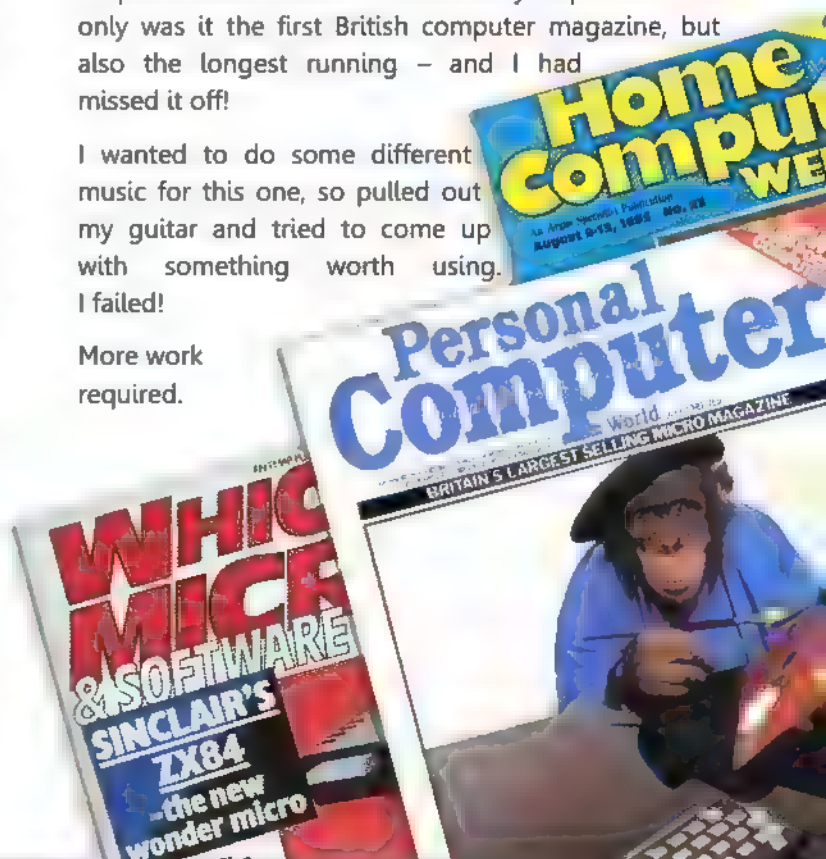
Most of my reading was done digitally, but now I needed some photographs. I needed better quality close-ups of various pages, better page scans for those not available on the internet, and shots of the magazines together.

As I pulled out all of collection and started to group them, out fell a copy Personal Computer World. I didn't have that in my list or on my graph! Back to the net for some research, back to the script and back to Photoshop Elements for the graph work.

A quick check showed it to be very important. Not only was it the first British computer magazine, but also the longest running – and I had missed it off!

I wanted to do some different music for this one, so pulled out my guitar and tried to come up with something worth using. I failed!

More work required.



I could get three times the information on screen. The audio was a bit tough with the requirement for three times the material.



The Music

I spent ages trying to work the guitar into the sequencer stuff and finally got something quite nice. Had to extend the main score with additional sub melodies (not like I know what I'm doing or anything!), added a chorus thing and dumped the whole lot out ready to mix in the guitar. Then spent a good few hours recording the guitar over and over again until it sounded right.

Come the next day I played it back and it didn't sound right! I recorded all the guitar stuff again. Now it sounds passable, just!

Music for the show has to be somewhat understated and not take away from the actual visuals and voice overs. Not wanting to use the word 'bland', but any background music has to be kind of forgettable - that's its job

A Bug

Just as things were moving forward I was hit with some kind of bug and felt terrible for about a week. I still had to get on with things though, time was quickly running out and I was also working on Episode 37.

I still had not completed all of the photography, and as I was pulling out my ZX Computing mags, out fell yet another magazine not in list, Personal Computer News. Back to the internet, back to the script, back to the graph!

I now was sure there could be no more mystery magazines left to find, so sat down and recorded the audio. With that done, and most of the photography complete, I could actually start putting it together.

The Audio

With the empty project ready to go, I

added the audio and the first magazine scans and photographs. It was all very short and lacked detail though, and not very impressive. At this point the triple screen effect was not even part of the feature, and I was struggling to get things to make sense.

Had lots of wine, a massive pizza and went to bed feeling rather fed up with things.

The next day and I forged ahead, re-writing the script to include much more details, and re-recording the audio ready for the project.

A Bright Idea

One day in mid-January I woke up and knew what I had to do. I also knew it would mean scrapping the entire project and making a fresh start. I had to use the triple screen effect to convey various aspects of the magazine. That way I could get three times the information on screen. Brilliant!

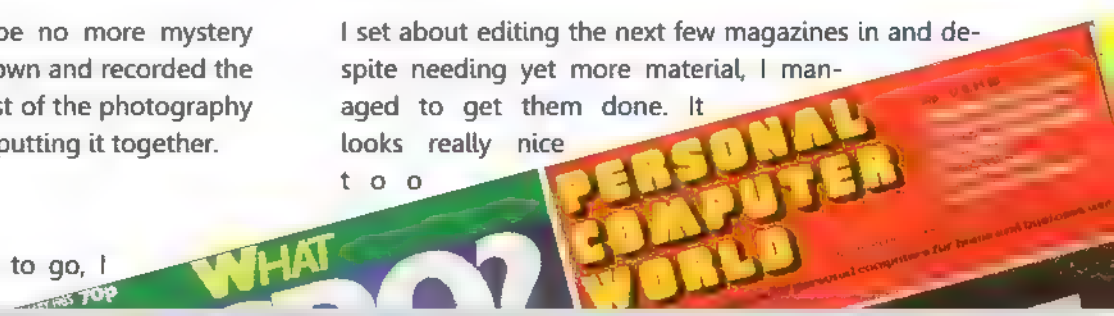
The downside of this though, was the requirement for three times the material. So back to the scanner, the internet, the camera and of course the microphone.

During the scanning of this new material I realised that all of my old Sinclair User magazines were missing! No idea what happened to them, I think I may have given them to Mort when he was scanning them many years ago. A bit sad about that.

Got down to the new project, added the audio, the music and the 30+ scans for the first magazine. To put things into perspective, so far the result of all my work amounts to less than 30 seconds of video. Still a long way to go.

I set about editing the next few magazines in and despite needing yet more material, I managed to get them done. It looks really nice

t o o





The Show Goes On

Most of the last two weeks in January was spent completing episode 37, and if I am honest it was a little rushed.

I immediately started the script for episode 38 while I was in the mood. I knew if I moved to the magazine feature it would get left until the last minute. This took me to the end of the January. I even managed to grab some video of Super Hang-On - a nice game that!

Blue Thunder! What a crap game! I was making good progress until this little piece of tripe landed. Forced myself to play it, and then moved onto the magazine work.

Back to plan and had to re-record the complete audio for Your Sinclair. The one I was using was a mix of three different files and it just didn't match properly. I took the opportunity to re-write it too, as it was just me whinging about why I didn't like it. As a result I then had to scan more pages in with higher DPI for the close-up work.

This was a recurring theme as I moved on, and the next magazine to get the re-write treatment was Crash. I had missed a few elements out and the original was just a patched up mess. Now it sounded much better, but I had to grab more high resolution scans too.

Missing Data

Because I couldn't find detailed information about two magazines, I had left them out and just mentioned them in the summing up section. However, fate stepped in and I managed to track down enough material. This then of course meant a script re-write, more audio and more image work. Great!

This also meant re-building the graph to include them, stripping out all the graphs from the project and putting the new ones back in.

With just seven days to go before episode 37 was due out, I had to take a break from the feature to do the light pen footage.

With a weekend of being on-call (meaning I was house bound) gave me the chance to complete the episode just in time.

By late February the project was now looking good. All of the material was in, the audio was good and the pacing felt right. But, after watching it through it became apparent that the magazines were treated differently and did not give a fair impression. So, back to the script again.

Re-wrote several magazine pieces and re-recorded the audio.



I added these to the project along with new material required and spent a whole day moving things about to fit.

Still not fully happy I ended up re-writing the script for Big K, Computer Gamer and Home Computing Weekly. I must be mad.

The next episode of the show somehow made it out and now I am in March, and still not a complete project. More audio recording took place, and more scans were needed. Would this ever be finished?

Every bit of my spare time was now spent working on the feature, alongside of course, Episode 39. I think it's fair to say there were plenty of late nights, strong coffee and the occasional glass of wine.

I decided to work alternate days on each episode and by the middle of March I had most of the material in and edited for both. I was shattered, but it was not over yet.

Dedicating week three of March to just Episode 39 paid off, and I got that out of the way pending a final render and check. That left me without about 6 weeks to complete the magazine feature. It had now become apparent that there would be no time or space for anything else in episode 40, with the draft project running in around 42 minutes.

Projects are always too large, and there is a lot of tightening up and edits to go in yet, which usually reduced the whole thing by five minutes. Even so, this could end up being a long episode.

As the final week arrived it was time to complete episode 39 and get it out. It rendered fine but then I noticed something. Because it was rushed, there are parts of the feature for the RAMWRITE interface that are inconsistent. Some footage includes the printer, others

don't. The continuity is all over the place. Maybe it's me being too pedantic! I didn't have time to change it.

With episode 39 released I was clear to work on the final episode of the series, almost in a zombie-like state.

Watching back the first few minutes, it was easy to tell I was experimenting with the triple screen effect, and some of the work was decidedly ropey. I went back over it fixing all the rough edges, but that lost me another few days.

Another One!

Just when I thought things were going well, another magazine turned up. I knew it existed because I had a copy of it, but could not locate any details when I tried months earlier. For that reason it was only going to get a very brief mention at the end of the feature.

Unluckily, depending on which way you look at things, I happened across a website with enough data to warrant the magazine being included in the main feature.

Back to the script again, back to the graphs, back to the microphone and back to the scanner, finally Micro Decision was ready to be added.



Monumental

It was around this time, somewhere in early April that I decided to start again. From the beginning.

It was a big decision, but the audio was all over the place due to so many additions, the style was a bit off and the whole thing was looking like it had been thrown together in a rush.

I edited the script and re-recorded it all in a single session, meaning it was now all the same level and inflexion. I re-built the project from scratch and re-did the graphs. Now I just had 3 weeks to edit things together.

At this point I told myself this would be the last episode of the show. There was no way I would go through this again.

The last ever episode

By Sunday 12th April I had reached magazine number 3, Computing Today. Watching it back made me happy that I had made that earlier decision, it was much better, and more along the lines of what I originally wanted to do.

A few days of rest were in order. I couldn't face even loading the project up.

From somewhere my enthusiasm returned and I spent the next 4 days working like a man possessed. Progress was great, and the feature was looking really nice.

A few days before release and it was time for the first render. I was looking forward to watching it properly rather than inside the project window. Sadly and annoyingly, it crashed my computer.

Tried again and at 95% the process just stopped. No explanation, it just produced a file with 5% missing. This is just what I didn't need.

I had no idea why this was happening. No idea how to fix it. My gut instinct was to forget the whole thing and just stop doing it. This amount of effort for this amount of frustration is simply not worth it. I wasted a whole day of my life, rendering out 95% of the project only to have it crash.

So, what do I do now?

I considered buying another video editing package and re-building the whole project, but just couldn't justify it. I considered re-



building the whole project, but again, just couldn't justify it. Was this the end of The Spectrum Show?

After a few glasses of wine...

After a few glasses of wine I found myself thinking logically, and rendered out the last 15% of the show. This pinpointed the problem. At some point during the graph being swivelled, the render engine got upset and gave up. I removed all of the 3D stuff and tried again – success! The last 15% rendered out with a static graph.

Now I had to re-add all of the graph movement, zoom and swivel to match the audio. Re-render the last 15% and it worked.

Now the big one.. re-render the whole project. Twenty minutes later – no error! Loaded the file into a viewer and it worked. There was a small audio glitch at the start of C&VG, but at this point I was just glad it was complete.

It was 10pm on Saturday 25th April and I had my final render ready for release. A 2.2gb file of video data that had taken over four months to compile and edit.

The final feature looked terrific, and something I am immensely proud of, but the sheer effort involved still does not seem worth it.

I am glad I persevered.



BLADE ALLEY

ARCADE
1983

Taking your ion-driven interceptor, you dive into the enemies defensive trench with the sole aim of destroying as many enemy craft as possible.

Taking its lead from the Deathstar scene in Star Wars, the game is a basic 3D shoot-em-up.

There is no more back story, just get in and kill stuff.

The trench is represented by flashing blocks, there's no really smooth movement but you do get a kind of 3D feel, and I suppose it was 1983.

Your ship is seen from behind, and the enemy approach from the distance, getting larger as they get nearer.

Your ship can move up and down as well as side to side, and your laser fires in the appropriate direction at the height of your ship.

Your ship and the enemies have shadows which is used to line up your shot.

If you are not precise then it's curtains. The aliens will collide with you and you loose a life.

The continuous sound is fine at the start, but soon gets irritating. It is though, interspersed with firing and explosions.

There are, according to the inlay, 11 levels, and it's a challenge getting to see them all.

After the trench, we are taken to what presumably is a planet surface that reminds me of the Buck Rogers game.

This also brings additional enemies that bounce along the ground. Luckily you can't crash into the ground, so hitting these is usually easy.

The next level adds an upper level with small asteroids hurtling towards you, at least that's what they look like.



Next we have a moving horizon which works really well and then we are sent into open space. No landscape or shadow, just lots of things to shoot.

To complete a level you have to destroy a number of saucers and these are indicated in the bottom left of the control panel.

This means levels can be quick if you are on target, or long, if you aren't.

It also means you can concentrate on the saucers instead of points chasing.

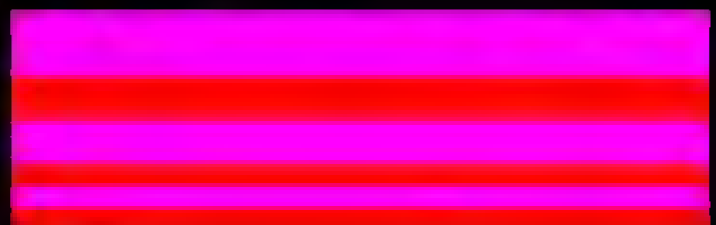
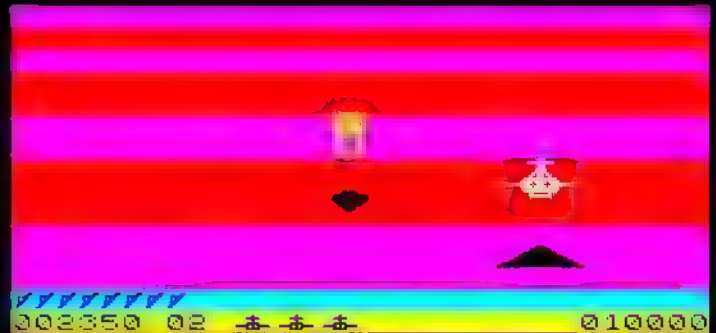
This will let you progress, but obviously gives you a low score.

Control is via keyboard or joystick and both are responsive and overall, although very basic looking, the game isn't too bad.

I like it, and it's one of those games I like to load up for a few minutes to blast a few aliens now and again...

The whole game reminds me very much of Buck Rogers, but this one has more levels and is easier to play.

Give it a try.





GHOST HUNT

PSS 1983

By the evil looking skull on the cover, you might think that this 16K game has something to do with ghosts and skeletons, but in fact it's a run of the mill Pacman clone.

The maze is different from the arcade game in both look and design, and features tunnels that allow the player to exit one side and appear at the other. This helps when the ghosts are closing in and you can't get to one of the power pills.

You can control your character using the cursor keys, which is tricky, but you could always use a cursor joystick. The response is fast but all of the graphics move in 8 pixel jumps.

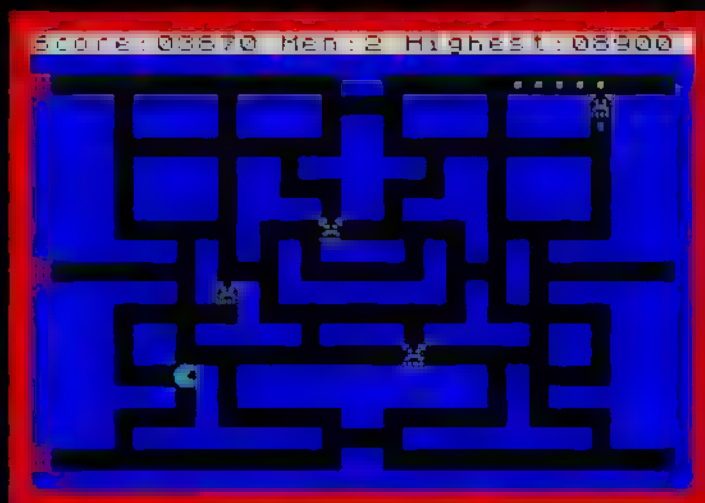
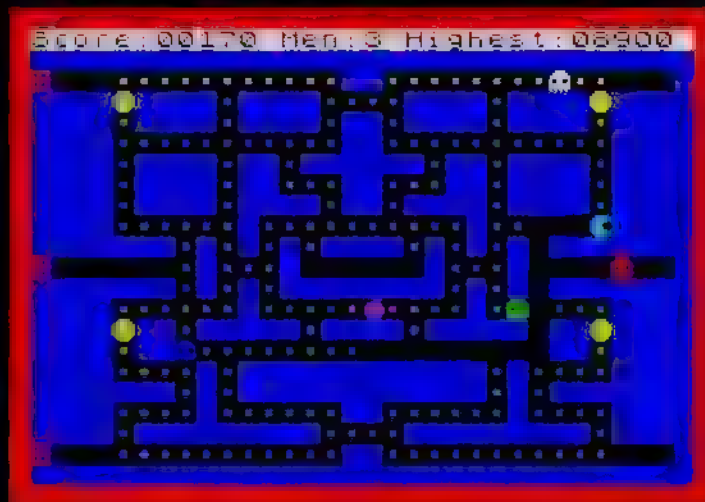
Because of this, things look a little jerky, but the gameplay doesn't really suffer because of it. There is no animation either, so games like this could have easily appeared as type-ins.

As with the arcade, when a pill is eaten this allows your character to chase and kill the ghosts, and using these strategically is the key to this and every other Pacman clone.

There are a few sound effects, but at the end of the day, this is just another in a very long list of average Pacman variants.

The game has several skill levels. Playing on level 1 gives you a playable game, but to try another level you have to reload. The higher the level number the faster the game goes, and at the highest setting it's impossible to play.

Once you complete the level, the next one follows but there is no change to the layout, so it soon becomes



repetitive.

There are bonus fruit to collect for extra points, but the ghosts movement is random, and they do not follow the arcade patterns. They don't for example, take chase when they get close like the arcade counterparts.

I suppose for a 16K game this isn't bad, but certainly not a top contender for perfect Pacman.

An average game at best.

GALAXIANS

Artic Computing 1982

Galaxian was and still is, a fantastic arcade game, originally released in 1979 by Namco. Because of its relative simplicity, it wasn't long before versions began to appear on home consoles, computers, and what we used to call TV Games.

Very few were actual official licences, instead the games companies tweaked something, renamed something, or just plain ignored any copyright dangers.

The Spectrum had many versions, some very bad, some excellent, and Artic Computing's offering falls into the latter category.

The game screen has been reduced in width by a large panel that displays the number of lives left along with the high score and current score. This creates a screen ratio similar to that of the arcade, something a lot of competitors forgot about.

This narrow screen is suitably filled by the familiar rows of Galaxians, plodding along and occasionally diving down to drop a few bombs onto your ship.

You are armed with a laser that can only fire one shot at a time, so missing a column of aliens means you have to wait for another try.

The aliens themselves look like the arcade version and move really smoothly both when plodding across the screen and when diving.

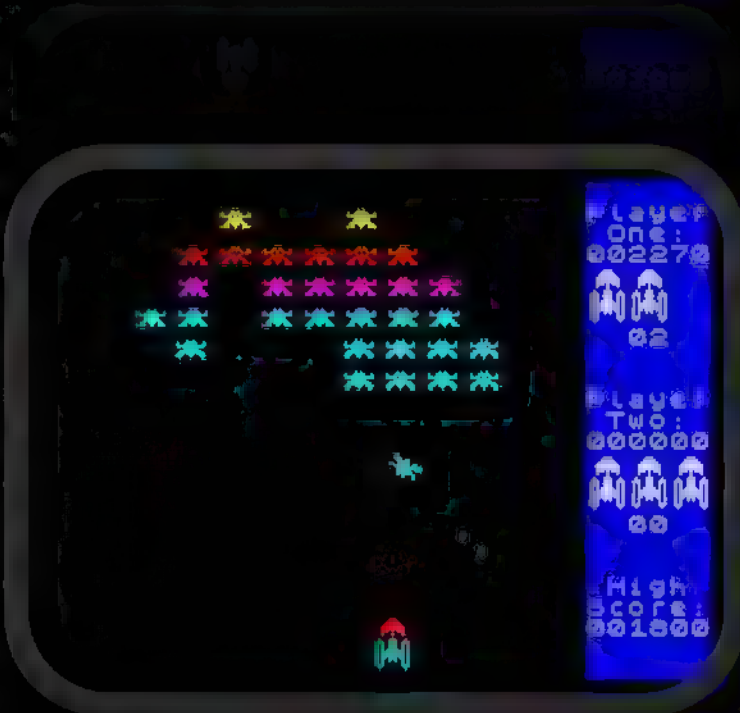
Your ship looks great, and despite a little flickering, moves well and responds to your control quickly.

Sound is used well, with lots on offer, the only thing missing is the firing sound, which is a real shame.

The game offers 9 levels of difficulty, with level 1 being the same as the arcade game, level 9 provokes the Galaxians to attack almost non-stop, meaning a pretty tough challenge.

The only thing missing apart from a firing sound is a scrolling star field, but I can forgive this because the game is great to play. Considering it's a 16K game, too, this is a must for any arcade fan.

An excellent arcade shooter.



The Hobbit



The 1983 Classic
Re-imagined for
2015

When The Hobbit was released in 1983, the gaming world thought it was revolutionary. It broke the mould of adventure games and introduced new concepts into the arena.

Not only did it employ great graphics for many of its locations, but the artificial intelligence of the other characters astounded game players.

The complex parser meant you could talk to the game in English, which sometimes lead to strange goings on in the land of Middle Earth.

This 48K game was heralded as the best thing to happen to home computing, and especially those players who loved getting knee deep in goblins, dragons and swordplay. But, could it have been better?

In today's world where Sir Clive's machine has been turned inside out, and every secret documented and every last bit of power extracted from its tiny CPU, could modern techniques improve the game.

There are two elements to look at, the game itself and the graphics. Due to the way it was written and how the game text was compressed and squeezed into memory, the first option would be tricky, but the second proved too tempting for the community to resist.

Using 128k instead of 48, and employing data compression techniques, a group of Spectrum users set about re-building all the graphics for the game, and in some instances, using other computer versions of the game for inspiration.

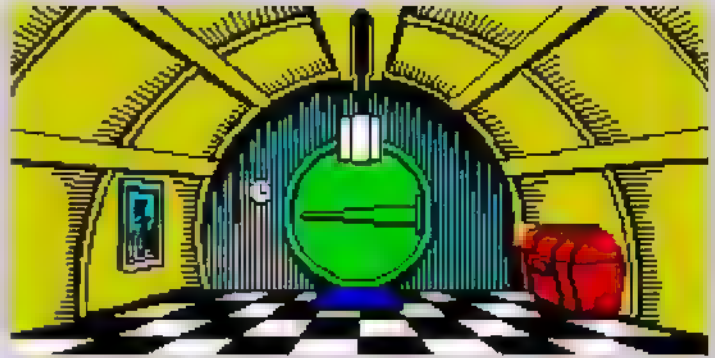
The result is a glorious re-imagining of the original. Gone are the flat, single colour filled images, replaced instead with some great artwork.

The game plays the same, but the new graphics make it shine like it never did before. Each location looks fresh and new, just like when you first played it.

The community did a fantastic job of collating and drafting the images, and finally releasing the 128k version to the world.

Despite some objections to certain attribute usage for some images, Kayamon made the final push and compiled everything together.

A classis game made even better.



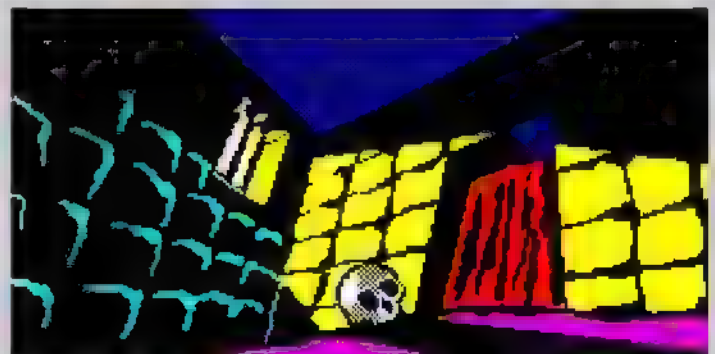
You are in a comfortable tunnel like hall
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

> LOOK
+



You go north.
You are in the trolls cave
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

> N
YOU CANNOT GO NORTH.
> OPEN DOOR
> N
+



The nasty goblin captures you.
You are in the goblins dungeon
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

> E
> EE
> NN
> DD
+



BERZERK SHOOT OUT

Berzerk was released into the arcade in 1980 by Stern Electronics, and was one of those early simplistic games that proved very popular.

It was easy to play yet difficult to beat.

You control a man running around a maze infested with robots. You have to kill them all to move on to the next level, where things get harder and the robots start to fire back.

The walls of the maze are deadly too, so accurate control is important – and not forgetting evil Otto, a large smiley face that cannot be killed, who appears after a short time and chases the player away. This element was added to keep the game play frantic.

The arcade game also featured speech...a novelty back in 1980...

A simple looking game then, but how would the Spectrum clones stack up?



CYBO RUN - Calisto

This game is fast and furious and sticks to the arcade version quite closely. The movement is a lot faster and sometimes difficult to be accurate, especially near walls.

The robots fire back on the first level, which makes things harder, I think it would have been better to keep to the original formula.

The maze looks like it is drawn randomly each time, which does cause spawning issues. If you die or leave a room, you spawn in the middle of the play area, so if the random routine draws a wall over you, its instant death.. this is very frustrating.

This also means moving from room to room can be odd, as you do not naturally appear where you would expect.

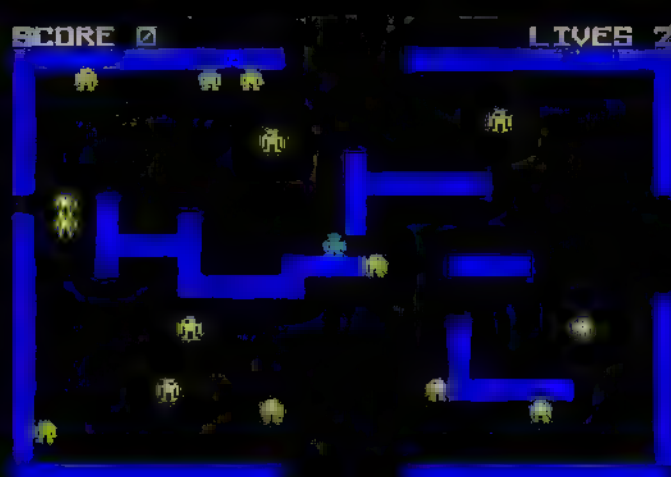
You can't fire or run diagonally but the robots can, so this makes things tricky and a bit unfair.

Evil Otto is present, and chases you out of the room, but does move a little too fast, especially considering it's the early stages of the game.

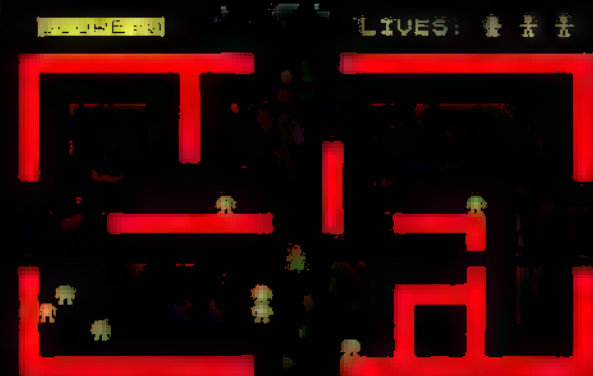
Graphics are chunky but work well, and do not move smoothly, but this does help when trying not to bump into walls or lining up shots.

Sound is used very well, with a variety of effects on offer.

All together then, not a bad game.



FRENZY - Quicksilver



Out of the box it uses the keyboard to control the game, but the keys are tricky to use. Later Kempston released a conversion tape that allowed the game to be played using a joystick. I couldn't get this to work, so I tried one of the re-release version, and luckily that had a Kempston option.

The game plays just like the arcade version, although again the movement is much faster here.

The robots lumber about waiting to be shot and you can move from room to room. Stay on the screen for too long and Evil Otto arrives to move you on.

As you clear each set of robots the levels increase and the colour of the robots change.

In the second level they fire back and subsequent levels there are also mine layers and other things out to get you.

Graphics are character based and move in jumps, but this helps when lining shots up as with the previous game.

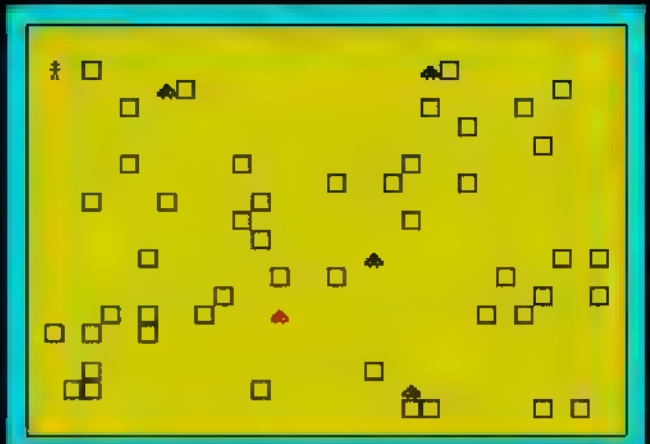
Sound is used well with some good effects but the death tune soon gets annoying.

You can run and shoot diagonally, but due to the speed of your movement, it's far easier to stick to the four basic directions.

Playability wise, this is a nice version.



ROBOT CHASE - Phipps Associates



Oh dear! We have here a very early commercial game written entirely in BASIC.

There is a long pause before the game starts and then it takes ages to draw the screen and it isn't actually a maze, more a jumble of blocks.

As the screen updates, each robot and the player is systematically checked for movement and updated. You can actually see each image flicker as the program checks its position and updates it. This also means there is a long delay in responding to key presses.

This is a terrible game, laughable really. All you have to do is force the robots to collide with one of the blocks. There is no shooting involved at all.

There is not much more I can say.

ZX BERSERK - Jega Software

Oh no... another BASIC game....

Things move slowly, sound is typical BASIC beeps and control is unresponsive.



Only one robot moves at a time but that is little consolation. I couldn't find a fire key either... so I'm not sure you can fire!

Oh well... another one to avoid...

BERZERK SHOOT OUT

ROBON - Softek



This game does not stick with the maze approach of the arcade, instead you have to clear the robots on the screen to progress. This means there are no exits and the game play is a bit like Robotron.

The robots head towards your position in jumps and it is quite easy to line them up.

A nice feature not seen in other games, but is in the arcade version, is that you can force the robots to kill themselves by bumping into walls. This is a good way to get rid of them.

The game won't let you fire and move at the same time, so you have to make sure you have enough time to move once you get the shot off.

If you take too long Robak arrives, and heads straight for you, leaving mines behind him. This takes the place of Evil Otto of the arcade game and helps speed progress up, although he can be shot, so he's not as evil as Evil Otto!

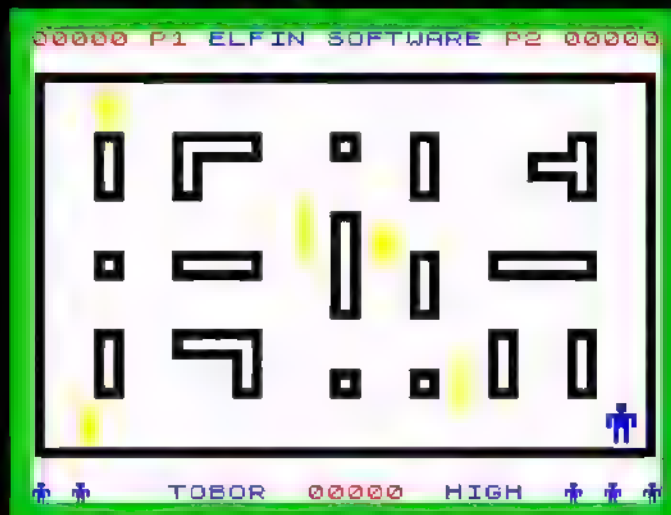
You can't run or fire diagonally, which is a pity really, although I'm not sure it would help in this game.

Graphics are chunky and suit the game and sound is used well with a nice variety of effects.

Gameplay is good and I really enjoyed this version. The mixture of shooting and hiding works well.

I spent a good while with this one even though it differs from the arcade...

TOBOR - Elfin Software



Again we see a departure from the arcade game, with a locked maze and a set number of robots to destroy.

The game starts with a tedious intro and you have to wait for your robot, and the others to get into place before the action begins. This soon become boring when you just want to get on and blast some droids.

Once the game actually begins the enemy robots march towards you.

Luckily the maze walls are not deadly, it's a good job too, as the key layout is horrible and causes your robot to run into the enemies when your trying to line up a shot.

The fire button only works if you are moving too, again causing a lot of frustration and loss of lives.

It wouldn't be so bad but you then have to sit through the intro again before you can get back to playing.

The graphics are large and move ok, but the colour scheme is a bit bright, and can begin to strain your eyes if you play too long.

Sound is used well which is the only plus point for me.

One to forget then...



FRENZY - Spectrum Games



This game was missed from the show, so this is a quick pick-up and test.

The game originally named Robotics, is the only one of our games that has graphics that look like the arcade.

The main character is tall and thin, but does move with a worrying amount of knee bending. Movement is in character squares, but you soon learn to ignore that.

The robots head towards you and you can take them out with straight or diagonal shots.

If you stay too long on one screen Evil Otto arrives and chases you. He moves too quickly though, unlike the arcade game, so getting away is difficult and sometimes impossible.

Sound is used well with some nice effects, but control is a bit sticky, and I did notice your character sometimes changes direction on his own.

Another issue is hitting the robots. You can only kill them if you hit them on the head, so you have to be extra careful when lining your shots up. They too can fire back in all directions, so it is not an easy game.

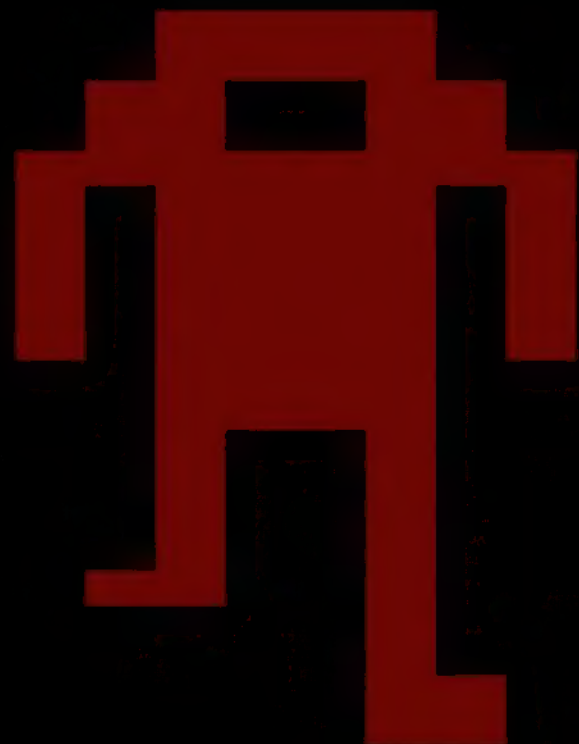
This is very close to the arcade game, and could easily be made to be much better.

Conclusion...

My original tests had two candidates for the best Spectrum version, but now with the inclusion of Frenzy from Spectrum Games, I think there are now three.

The closest to the arcade is Frenzy (SG), the only difference is the speed of Evil Otto and the fact you have to hit the robots in the head to destroy them. These problems makes the game just that little bit too frustrating.

The other Frenzy, from Quicksilva, still wins on playability though, so why not try both of them and see what you think.



GAME REVIEWS



The game, although it deals with defecating rhinos, is well written, great to play and looks superb.

The idea is that you are a dung beetle, and have to clear up after the rhino has emptied its bowels.

Before you can do this however, you have to eat food, but in a certain order.

At the start of each colourful level, you can only eat cherries. Once you have eaten all those, you grow larger and can now eat plums.

This continues until you are large enough to be able to move the dung.

The three piles have to be manoeuvred to the bottom of the screen and stacked inside a burger bun to make a lovely poo burger. Yum!

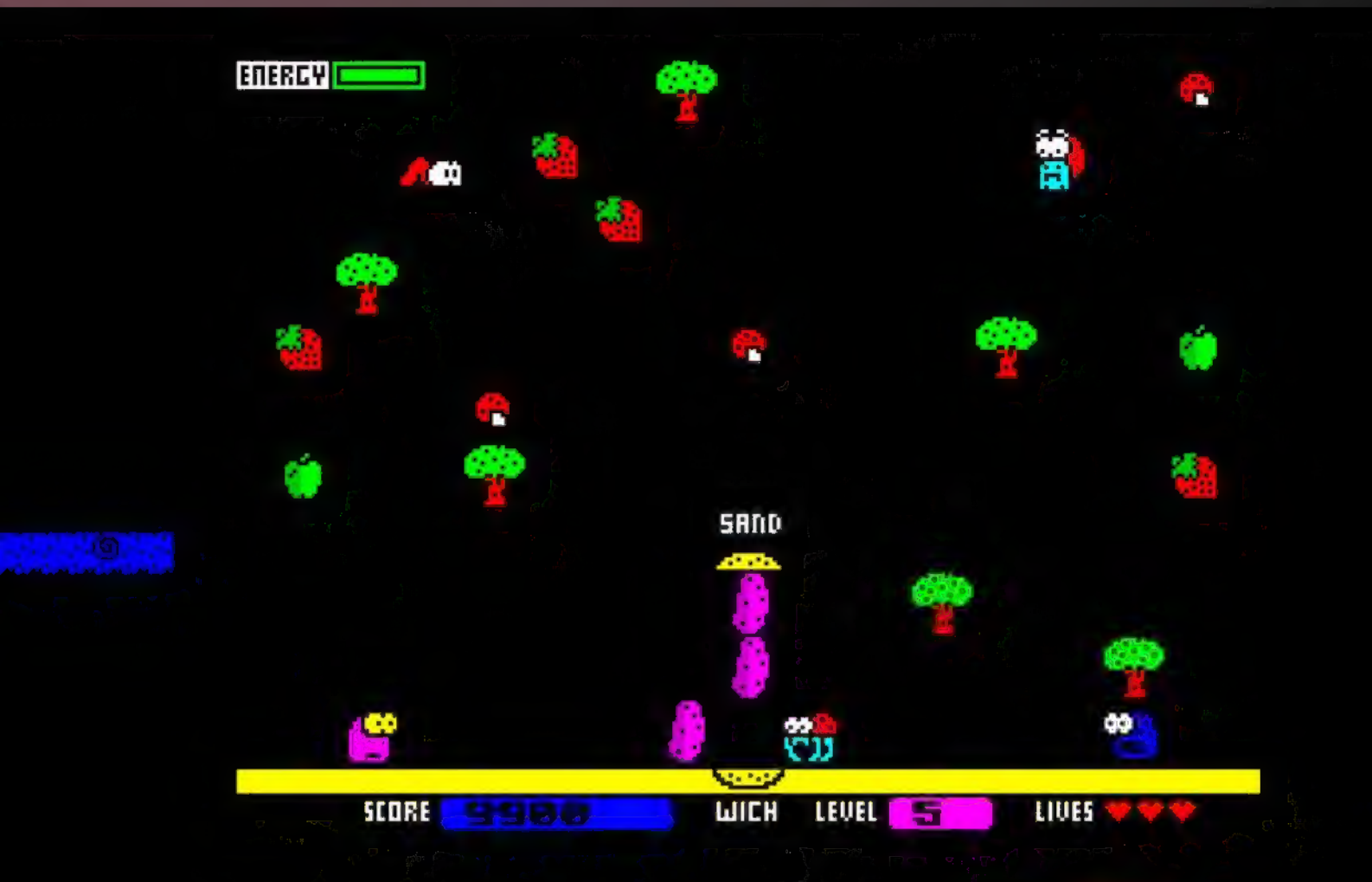
There are other things on screen too, that have to be avoided. Hitting something will lose your health which can be re-filled by eating the pills that randomly pop up. Some pills turn all the enemies into food for a short while too.

Once your burger is complete, your little bug yells Yeahhhh! and the level is complete. You then move to the next one, with different layouts and enemies.

Using a clever technique, the authors have managed to get more colours per character square, the result is wonderfully coloured graphics. On the down side, they do move in jumps rather than smoothly, but once you get over this, you hardly notice.

Gameplay is great and set just right, making progress a pleasure.





Control is responsive most of the time and sound is used really well.

There is limited control options, and I had to download the hacked version that allows QA OP and space to be used.

As the game progresses, more and more things arrive to get in your way, and this keeps things interesting.

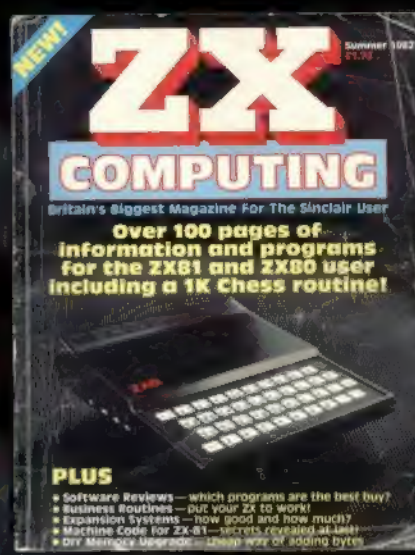
At times its hard to believe you are playing this game on a Spectrum, it looks stunning.

This is game you must try. I got immersed in it and spent a good few hours moving through the levels and having a great time.

A Big Smelly Thumbs Up!



ISSUE ONE COVERS



Happy days....